

Prosecution rests in 2002 murder of U. Florida student

University Wire

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The **prosecution rested** its case Monday against Choupite P. Casseus, the Haitian immigrant accused of raping and **murdering** University of **Florida** graduate **student** Alana Dennard in August **2002**.

Over the last week, prosecutors have presented a litany of evidence against the 35-year-old Casseus, who was Dennard's mechanic.

Lab tests confirmed both saliva on a cigar and semen found at the crime scene are consistent with Casseus' DNA. Also, Casseus possessed items reported stolen from Dennard's home, including a television, videocassette recorder, stereo and cell phone. Further, Gainesville Police took statements placing Casseus' red BMW outside Dennard's home the night of the **murder**. Friends and relatives testified she had rebuffed Casseus when he wanted a sexual relationship with her.

Firefighters found the body of Dennard, 24, inside her Northwest 31st Avenue home after a neighbor noticed her 14-month-old daughter Taylor unattended and called police.

She had been shot in the head at close range and left in a bathroom. Police never found the **murder** weapon.

Demond Wimberly, a friend of Dennard's, testified that the victim told him the following prior to her death: "He [Casseus] is a guy that fixes my car. He likes me, but I don't like him. He offered that if I sleep with him, I wouldn't have to pay him."

About a month before the **murder**, Dennard had been at the home of her aunt Wilhelmina Blake when her cell phone rang, Blake testified. Dennard answered and soon said, "Well, you're just my friend. You're not my boyfriend, you're just my friend. "

Blake asked her who it was, and Dennard said, "That was my mechanic."

Another friend of Dennard's, Derrick Randle, testified he called the victim shortly before she died. Dennard said she was busy, could not talk and would call him later.

Randle never heard from his friend again. Two and a half weeks before the **murder**, Dennard told him she had to stop employing her mechanic because "he got funny."

When Randle asked what went wrong, Dennard told him, "He got crazy."

Also Monday, prosecutors played a tape of Casseus speaking with his wife in the interrogation room at GPD headquarters. She asked him questions such as "What's going on? ... Whose stuff is that at our house? ... Do you still have a 9 mm? ... You don't kill nobody? ... Have you been sleeping with anyone?"

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Repeatedly, Casseus told his wife, "I don't have anything to do with it."

Defense attorney Tom Edwards noted no arrest had been made by that time, and the Casseuses could have left to have a conversation outside the police station.

Casseus told Judge Larry Turner he will not take the witness stand in his defense.

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